

Canadian and International Education / Education canadienne et internationale

Volume 43 | Issue 2

Article 10

September 2014

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Jennifer A. Kozak

University Of Western Ontario, jkozak3@uwo.ca

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Recommended Citation

Kozak, Jennifer A. (2014) "Book Review: Service-Learning in Theory and Practice: The Future of Community Engagement in Higher Education.," *Canadian and International Education / Education canadienne et internationale*: Vol. 43: Iss. 2, Article 10.

Available at: <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/cie-eci/vol43/iss2/10>

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Book Review

Service-learning in theory and practice: The future of community engagement in higher education. Dan W. Butin. (2010). New York: Palgrave MacMillan. 174 pp. (ISBN 9780230622517).

Reviewed by Jenn Kozak, Doctoral Candidate, University of Western Ontario.

Many organizations support ever increasing numbers of service-learning initiatives in colleges and universities across the continent (Hollander, 2010), making an examination of such initiatives of particular interest to Canadian scholars involved in comparative and international research. Dan Butin maintains that a lack of one unitary model for service-learning creates difficulties for integration into traditional conventions of higher education. For this reason Butin establishes limits and possibilities for service-learning, explores philosophical shifts needed for an institutionalizing of service-learning in higher education and offers suggestions for an attainable future for service-learning.

Following an informational foreword by Elizabeth Hollander and an impassioned preface by the author, Butin demonstrates the limitations and potential of service-learning in higher education. Throughout Chapter 1 Butin attempts to define and conceptualize service-learning from multiple perspectives, and tenders technical, cultural, political and antifoundational typologies. Chapter 2 explores the pedagogical, political, and institutional limits of service-learning and the impediment that these limits pose to its institutional longevity. In Chapter 3 Butin explains how external and internal limitations of service-learning represent powerful and transformative possibilities in higher education.

Chapter 4 examines the disciplining of service-learning as an intellectual movement comparable to women's studies. While Chapter 5 explores how some programs are already institutionalizing service-learning through recognized certificates, minors, and majors. Butin utilizes Chapter 6 to take the reader through an examination of other disciplines that provide additional insights into the evolution and incorporation of community engagement within the academy.

Butin persuades service-learning scholars and practitioners to reexamine "what they do and how they do it" since he believes that service-learning and community engagement should be no more novel or noteworthy than any other scholarly task (126). Chapter 7 helps faculty to view community engagement as another means of being a good scholar through the production and dissemination of knowledge and the search for truth. While Chapter 8 places service-learning and community engagement within the larger picture of the major contemporary trends and tensions in higher education.

A solid and logical structure is provided by Dan Butin which aids the reader since his arguments can sometimes be rather complex. This book should not be a starting point for scholars new to the field of service-learning since it is not concerned with the fundamentals of community-engaged learning models but it does offer insights useful to those concerned with the future of such programs in higher education. Butin focuses on defining and conceptualizing service-learning in higher education and the place it occupies within the sphere of academia.

Hironimus-Wendt & Lovell-Troy state, "[i]ndeed some of our own colleagues have questioned the strong emphasis on a 'transformative' role ascribed to service learning,

particularly regarding community change” and suggest a “more broadly theoretical foundation for service learning is warranted in order to encourage other educators to consider its adoption and implementation” (1999, p. 363). To support this suggestion, they reference the work of John Dewey and George Herbert Mead who are considered by some to be the originators of the service-learning concept, demonstrating that even in the preliminary stages, during the early 1900s, the leading experts held very different beliefs as to the exact role that experiential education could play in student development.

This publication is suitable for a scholarly audience already familiar with service learning, and are interested in a deeper examination, classification and possible future evolution of the phenomenon. It may seem counterintuitive that Butin highlights limitations of service-learning, and critiques the movement. However, the author believes it is through understanding the limitations of service-learning that its possibilities may be better understood. He also suggests that it is imperative that service-learning scholars take up the critique themselves in order to support the field’s own policies. Many works examine the “historical and sociological antecedents to the current movement” (Kraft, 1996, p. 131) making Butin’s forward thinking examination a welcome addition to the literature.

With the popularity of service learning within the last decade has come a sweeping, overarching, and perhaps unrealistic, expectation that service-learning will tackle a wide range of issues such as respect for diversity, civil responsibility, poverty reduction, social injustice and so on. One American university reports, “awareness of social justice issues increased as students, primarily members of a privileged population, began working in solidarity with a marginalized population” (Tilley-Lubbs, 2004, p. 153). This book illustrates a need for a transformation of service learning shifting it away from the social movement that it currently represents, converting it into an intellectual movement and helping it become a disciplined field within the academy.

Drawing from my own experience as designer and co-ordinator of an International Service Learning program, students compare their Canadian and international learning experiences without realizing it by expressing feelings of “culture shock”, “understanding the value of hard work”, and “a realization how materialistic our culture is” in the reflective writing they submit. This program is offered as an option in the intermediate and advanced Spanish language courses. Students are informed of the additional costs and workload on the first day of classes. Due to the additional costs and time commitment it seems the program should appeal more to Butin’s “target student” as described in Chapter 2. That said, the group of 17 students in the first year of the program ranged from twenty to thirty-two years of age and included students from various socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds as well as Butin’s “white, sheltered, middle-class, single, without children, unindebted and between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four” (p. 31).

Dan Butin is thorough in his critical examination of service-learning and is adamant about the steps that must be taken for service-learning to flourish in higher education. While only time will tell if his theories will produce the desired effects, it will not be for want of a well thought out strategy as illustrated within the pages of *Service-learning in theory and practice: The future of community engagement in higher education*.

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